

# Mount Jefferson



Mount Jefferson lies along the drainage divide between the north and south forks of the New River - one of the oldest rivers in North America and in the world. This drainage system had an important influence on the size and shape of the mountain.

As with nearby peaks, Mount Jefferson is one of the remnants of a lofty, mountainous region that existed throughout much of the western part of the state in the remote geological past. Weathering and the erosive action of streams wore away the softer, less resistant rocks over broad areas, while locally more resistant rocks were slower to erode, leaving behind peaks such as Mount Jefferson standing above a plateau-like surface. Amphibolite and metagraywacke are the primary components of the mountain.

# Picnicking

The picnic area is in a beautiful wooded location near the summit of Mount Jefferson. Facilities include 19 tables and eight grills. Also included is an eight-table handicap accessible picnic shelter with a fireplace, large grill and drinking fountain. The shelter may be reserved. Restrooms are located nearby (not handicap accessible). Northern red and chestnut oaks provide a shady spot for picnicking. Chipmunks, woodchucks, squirrels and ravens are often seen nearby. Trailheads are located at the picnic area, also.



# History Highlights

Though there is no evidence of permanent Indian settlements in the Ashe County area, game was plentiful and both the Cherokees and the Shawnees claimed it as a hunting ground. The first settlers in the area were from Virginia. Few North Carolinians, other than such adventurous individuals as Daniel Boone, had ventured westward beyond the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Before the revolution, Mount Jefferson was known as Panther Mountain, perhaps because of a legend that tells of a panther that attacked and killed a child there. Area residents gave the mountain other names until 1952, when Mount Jefferson became its official name. The mountain's name was chosen in honor of Thomas Jefferson and his father, Peter, who owned land in the area and surveyed the nearby North Carolina-Virginia border in 1749. Around the time of the Civil War, legend holds that the "caves" beneath Mount Jefferson's ledges served as hideouts for escaped slaves traveling to freedom on the Underground Railroad.

**A Park Established:** Mount Jefferson State Park had its beginnings in the 1930s, when the Works Progress Administration constructed a road, little more than two miles, to the summit of Mount Jefferson. In 1939, local officials wanted to have the road improved but the state could not provide funds for a private road. Thus, two prominent local citizens donated 26 acres of land for a public park and thereby attained the road improvements. In 1941, efforts to have the local park accepted as a state park failed. Though, in 1952, the area became a state forest wayside park. Continued efforts to attain state park status were unsuccessful, as standards adopted in 1955 required that a state park be a minimum of 400 acres. Undaunted by continuous obstacles, local citizens obtained a 300-acre donation and succeeded in raising funds to buy an additional 164 acres for the park. As a result of their determination, Mount Jefferson became a state park in October 1956.

# Nature's Classroom

Mount Jefferson State Natural Area holds the key to many of nature's best-kept secrets. Unlock the door to nature's classroom and watch the mysteries begin to unfold. Our rangers will guide you on exciting explorations where you'll uncover fascinating natural surroundings and make great discoveries about the world in which we live. Bring our state's rich natural and cultural heritage alive; embark on a learning adventure at Mount Jefferson and discover the wonders of this mountain forest.

Join a regularly scheduled interpretive program or contact the park office to arrange a special exploration for your group or class.

### Reservations

**A full-service, online- and call center-based reservations system is now available and can be used to reserve campsites, picnic shelters and other park facilities. Visit [www.ncparks.gov](http://www.ncparks.gov) or call 1-877-7-CAMP-NC to make reservations.**

# Trails

An investment of two hours offers a high return, as the beauty and diversity of the park are best seen while hiking along its trails. Spectacular views of the surrounding countryside and a closer look at the park's vegetation are just a small part of the rewards reaped from a walk in this mountain forest.

### Overlooks

On the ascent to the summit of Mount Jefferson there are two overlooks that provide magnificent views of the surrounding area. Vistas from the first overlook may include over sixty miles of mountain peaks. The second overlook provides a view of three states, North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia.

### Summit Trail

Beginning at the parking area, this strenuous trail ascends 0.3 miles to the highest point on Mount Jefferson at 4,683 feet.

### Rhododendron Trail

Traversing the ridge top of Mount Jefferson, this strenuous 1.1-mile loop trail is known for its beautiful views and spring flowers of the Catawba rhododendron. The self-guided Rhododendron Trail follows a ridge southeast, along the crest of the mountain from the summit to Luther Rock, an outcrop of metamorphosed amphibolites.

### Lost Province Trail

The Lost Province Trail branches off of the Rhododendron Trail near Luther Rock. Traveling 0.75 miles along the southeast-facing slope of Mount Jefferson, this moderate trail explores a virgin oak/chestnut forest, providing views of the False Solomon's seal and other understory species.



# Flora & Fauna



**Plant Life:** Mount Jefferson State Natural Area is a botanical paradise. The slopes and summit of the mountain are home to a diverse population of trees, shrubs and wildflowers. This large variety of interesting and unusual plants qualified the area for designation as a national natural landmark by the National Park Service in 1975.

At altitudes above 4,000 feet, an oak/chestnut forest dominates the slopes facing south, east and west. Beneath the canopy of oak, an understory of Catawba rhododendron, mountain laurel, flame azalea and dogwood flourishes. Wildflowers include trillium, pink lady slipper and false lily of the valley.

Until the early 20th century, American chestnut trees were abundant in the area. The chestnut's rot-resistant wood was immensely valuable to early settlers for the construction of buildings and fences and its large, sweet nuts were food for humans and animals. Tragically, the chestnut blight, introduced from Europe in 1910, devastated the species here and elsewhere.

On the north slopes, a cove forest includes red maple, yellow birch, tulip tree and basswood. Mountain ash, prairie willow, black huckleberry and mountain pepperbush make up the understory. Hobblebush, mayapple, blue bead lily and other shrubs and herbs cover the forest floor.

On the slopes below the second overlook is a stand of big-toothed aspen trees. The big-toothed aspen is primarily a northern plant, found in North Carolina only in Ashe and Haywood counties. Trees growing on the northern ridges and slopes of Mount Jefferson are gnarled and dwarfed, averaging only about 20 feet. Their growth has been stunted by exposure to strong northerly winds and heavy loads of ice in winter.

**Animal Life:** The park's mature deciduous forests are home to many common mammals, including gray squirrels, southern flying squirrels, eastern chipmunks, red foxes, raccoons and Virginia opossums. Shrews, moles and mice also make their

homes in the middle altitudes. Woodchucks, white-tailed deer and an occasional bear inhabit the forest edges. Reptiles, such as skinks and small snakes, travel in and around rotting logs and other places offering food and seclusion.

**Bird life:** These high-altitude forests includes several species not seen at lower elevations. Lucky visitors may catch a glimpse of a red-tailed hawk, the most common hawk in the area. Chestnut-sided warblers, Canada warblers and black-throated blue warblers, as well as rose-breasted grosbeaks, slate-colored juncos and white-breasted nuthatches nest in the woodlands. Their melodies are often heard with the song of the veery at dusk and dawn. The wing beats of flushed ruffed grouse often surprise hikers along the trail.



# Rules & Regulations

Make your visit to Mount Jefferson a safe and rewarding experience. Some of our regulations are posted throughout the park for the protection of our visitors and our park. A complete list is available at the park office. Help preserve our natural resources by observing the following:

- ☐ The removal of any plant, animal, rock or artifact is prohibited.
- ☐ Hunting or trapping is not permitted. All state parks are wildlife preserves.
- ☐ Do not litter. Help maintain a clean environment for other visitors by placing trash in proper receptacles. State law requires aluminum cans and plastic bottles to be placed in recycling containers.
- ☐ Fireworks are not permitted.
- ☐ The possession or consumption of alcoholic beverages is prohibited.
- ☐ North Carolina motor vehicle and traffic laws apply in the park.
- ☐ Pets must be on a leash no longer than six feet.
- ☐ Camping is not permitted.
- ☐ Fires are permitted only in designated areas.

# For Your Safety

To prevent accidents, remember these safety tips.

- ☐ Do not feed or approach wildlife. North Carolina is experiencing a rise in incidents of rabies. Report sick or aggressive animals to park staff.
- ☐ When hiking, stay on designated trails and away from cliff faces.
- ☐ Be alert to approaching storms and leave the mountain top immediately.
- ☐ Venomous snakes, ticks and poison ivy may be found along park trails. Exercise caution.
- ☐ Remember daylight hours are shorter in the fall and winter. Allow plenty of time for a hike to avoid being caught by darkness.

Contact park staff for other safety tips or explanation of park rules.

# Welcome!

Mount Jefferson rises abruptly to more than 1,600 feet above the surrounding landscape, serving as a landmark for area motorists. Rising as a long, forested prominence, its dark color is conspicuous among neighboring peaks on the Ashe plateau.



Though the mountain is magnificent from a distance, Mount Jefferson is best appreciated up close. On a clear day, you can see for miles from its peak. A great part of Ashe County spreads out below — fields, farms, forests and mountains — mingling in kaleidoscopic patterns. On the horizon, the Blue Ridge Mountains form a striking backdrop.

Yet what looms in the distance is no more spectacular than what is right before your eyes, for the forests of Mount Jefferson are a botanical paradise. The interesting and unusual plant life of the park rendered it worthy of designation as a national natural landmark.

## Information

To learn more about Mount Jefferson State Natural Area, contact:

Mount Jefferson State Natural Area  
1481 Mt Jefferson State Park Rd.  
West Jefferson, NC 28694  
(336) 246-9653  
mount.jefferson@ncdenr.gov  
www.ncparks.gov

Discover other North Carolina state parks and recreation areas, contact:

N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation  
Dept. of Environment and Natural Resources  
1615 Mail Service Center  
Raleigh, NC 27699-1615  
(919) 733-4181

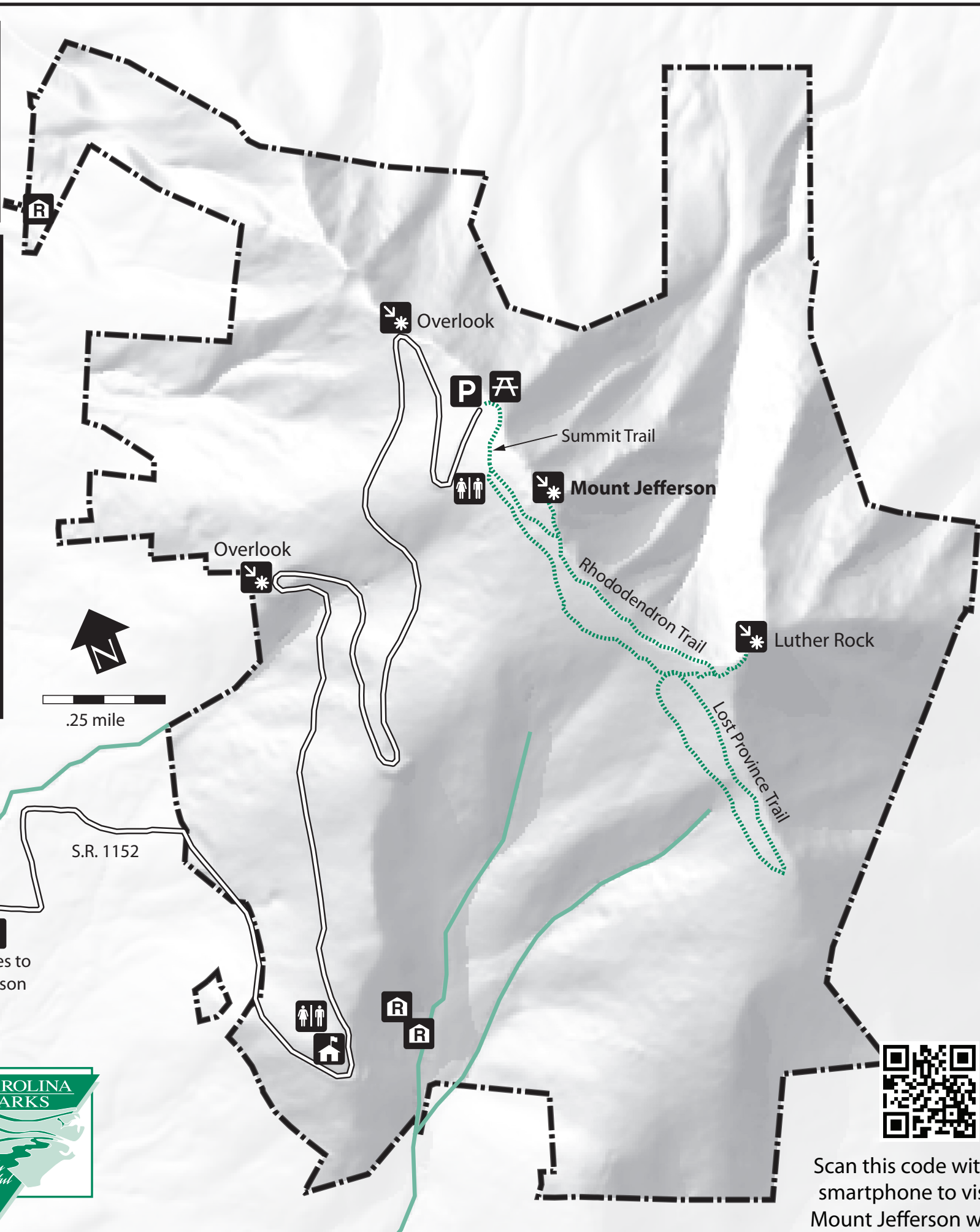
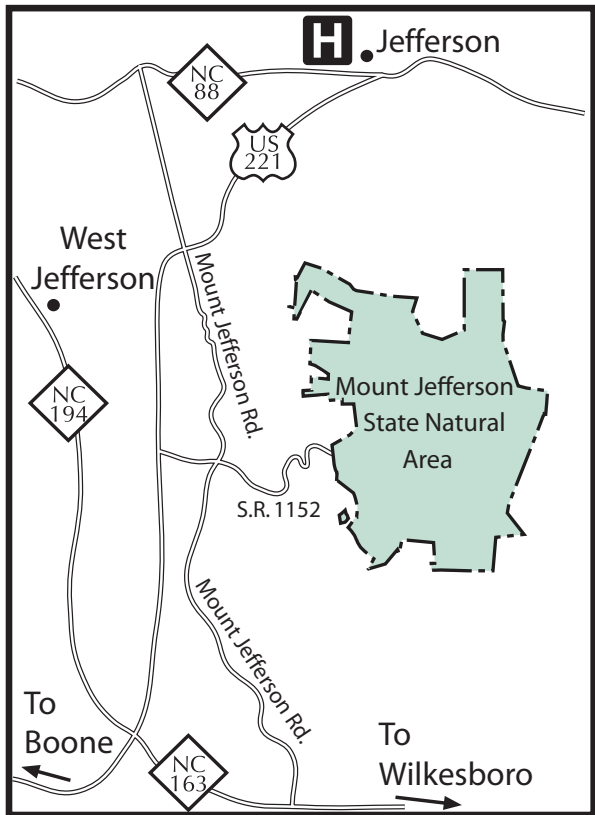
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# MOUNT JEFFERSON STATE NATURAL AREA

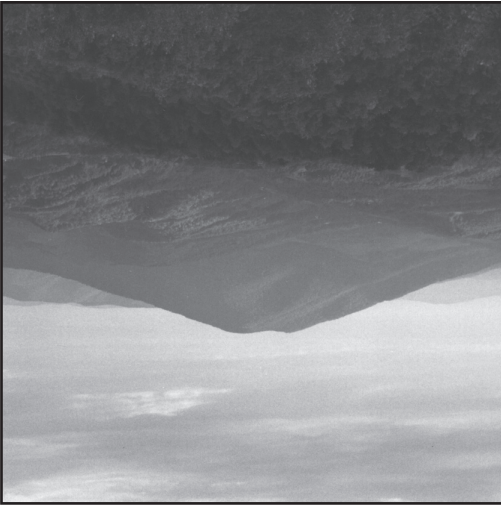
## LEGEND

- Hiking Trail
- Hospital - Ashe Memorial (336) 846-7101
- EMERGENCY - DIAL 911**
- Park Boundary
- Park Office
- Parking
- Picnic Area
- Point of Interest
- Ranger Residence
- Restrooms
- Roads



Scan this code with your smartphone to visit the Mount Jefferson website.

N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation  
Department of Environment and Natural Resources



# NATURAL AREA JEFFERSON STATE MOUNT NATURAL AREA

## Free App Available

Scan this code with your smart-phone to download the free N.C. State Parks app.



Mount Jefferson State Natural Area is in Ashe County on US 221 Bypass between the towns of Jefferson and West Jefferson. Follow the signs to the park.

## Park Hours

November - February	9 a.m. - 5 p.m.
March & April	9 a.m. - 7 p.m.
May - August	9 a.m. - 8 p.m.
September & October	9 a.m. - 7 p.m.

Closed Christmas Day  
Call ahead before a visit in winter months; inclement weather often makes mountain roads impassable.